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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effect of school location (city or county) on the relationship between four independent variables (number of private schools, existence of social elite enrolled in private schools, private school affiliation, and private school type) and a series of eight attitudinal items tapping public school superintendents' ideas on two issues. The first four of the dependent variables--increased faith in the public school system, poor private school facilities, poor quality education in private schools, and increasing tuition costs--deal with why students return to public schools, while the second four--private schools took student overload, private schools provided an outlet for racial tension, private schools made public school officials more aware of needs, and private schools created community-based social tensions--deal with the social impact of private schools. The only independent variable that met important criteria for each of the first four models was school type (elementary or all levels). In the second group, only one variable was important in as many as three models and that was the incidence of social elites. (Author/IRT)

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Private Schools and Public School Officials: An Attitudinal Study of Social Impact and Decline In The Deep South *

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Introduction

The private school is not a newcomer to our educational system, however, in recent years development in many Southern states has been attributed to a rather new factor. No longer can all private schools be realistically explained in terms of the social elite or religious belief. The newest wave of private school development might well be explained in terms of a desire for continued racial segregation.

Since the Brown decision (Brown vs Board of Education, 1954) declared "separate but equal" to be most certainly unequal, white parents dissatisfied with the move towards educational integration have removed their children from the public schools and formed private white academies. Following the adoption of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, this phenomenon became quite widespread, yet, peak white abandonment of public schools occurred during 1969 and 1970 (Champagne: 1973) as parents reacted strongly to court ordered desegregation throughout the South.

Documentation of white academy formation is somewhat limited; furthermore, few studies accomplish more than enumeration and description. Concerning the development of private schools in Mississippi, Palmer (1971) related growth to socioeconomic status (SES), finding that a positive correlation existed between racial SES discrepancy and white abandonment. Lowry (1973) concerned also with Mississippi, suggested white academy development may be a stage of educational change, proposing residential integration as an ultimate solution. Florida segregation academies were the subject of study for Wiles (1972) who outlined not only growth, but also facilities and programs; finding that many were copies of public school systems. The author also suggests that labeling all private academies as racist may be unfair, and though racism may be the driving force in many instances, these schools may be the only source of disruption-free education.

Like Mississippi, Florida, and other southern states, Alabama has experienced similar private academy development. According to Champagne (1973:59) the number of private schools increased from 83 in 1969 to 146 in 1970. A closer look at Alabama's segregation academies has been provided by Walden and Cleveland (1971) who explored the growth and structure of academies, Exodus was found to correlate positively with black percentage of the school population. By 1970, growth had slowed, but no trend of return had been realized.

This study is an effort to explore the effect of school location (city or county) on the relationship between four independent variables (number of private schools, existence of social elite enrolled in private schools, private achool affiliation, private school type) and a series of eight attitudinal items tapping public school superintendents' ideas about the return of students to the public schools and the social impact of the private schools.

Data and Methods

Data for this research were collected utilizing the mailed questionnaire technique. The sample consisted of all public school superintendents in the state of Alabama. The data were collected during August, 1975 with a return rate of over 70 percent. Therefore we believe that these data are representative of public school superintendents in Alabama. The instrument consisted of an inventory sheet, to accumulate data concerning the extent and type of private school development from 1967 to 1975, and a series of attitudianl items designed to tap information concerning the demise and social impact of the private academies.

For this analysis we have restricted the sample to those superintendents who reported private school development in their school districts (N = 47). Since this study is exploratory and a sub-sample is being utilized, statistical analysis has been limited to the use of Yule's Q as a measure of association.

Variables used in this analysis have been dichotomized to limit the occurrence of zero cells. The independent varibles and their respective categories are as follows:

1.	Number of private schools	1 = one	2 = more than one
2.	Social elite in private schools	1 = No	2 = Yes
3.	Private school affiliation	1 = church	2 = private
4.	Private school type	1 = elementary	2 = all levels

The dependent variables were all originally in a Likert-like response format (FA, A, U, D, FD). These have been collapsed into agree and disagree (FA + A A, U + D + FD D). The following eight items are the dependent variables for this study. The first four deal with why students return to public schools, and the last four deal with officials' attitudes concerning the social impact of private schools:

1) Increased faith in the public school system 1 = agree 2 = disagree

2) Poor private school facilities 1 = agree 2 = disagree

3) Poor quality education in private schools 1 = agree 2 = disagree

4) Increasing tuition costs 1 = agree 2 = disagree

5) Private schools took student overload 1 = agree 2 = disagree

6) Private schools provided an outlet for racial tension 1 = agree 2 = disagree

7) Private schools made public school officials more aware of needs 1 = agree 2 = disagree

8) Private schools created community based social tensions 1 = agree 2 = disagree

The breaksown variable is school system location. It is a two catagory nominal level variable: 1 = county 2 = city

The data for this study are presented in eight, six variable models.

Findings

Model I depicts the relationship between the independent variables and school superintendents' attitude concerning the return of students due to increased faith in the public schools. Of the six independent variables

Model I about here

only two appear to have meaningful importance ($Q \geq .30$). Both private school affiliation (-.61) and school type (elementary/all) (-.53) show strong negative relationships to the dependent variable. In other words, the private schools are predominantly church related, the public school superintendents are more likely to disagree with the statement that students are returning due to increased faith in the public schools. They are also more likely to disagree if the private schools are predominantly elementary schools and not evenly divided among all grade levels. In both cases the relationships were more pronounced in the data from the city school systems (-.80 vs -.47) for affiliation and (-.58 vs -.51) for school type.

The second model represents the level of association between the independent variables and the statement that students are returning to the public schools due to poor private school facilities.

Model II about here

Three of the independent variables in Model II meet our criteria for importance. The existence of the social elite in the private schools (+.54), private school affiliation (+.38) and private school type (-.56) all show reasonably strong relationships. If the social elite aren't overly represented in the private schools the public school officials' are more likely to agree that poor private school facilities are responsible for the return of students to the public schools. They are also likely to agree if the private schools are primarily non-church related and if the private schools are representative of all levels. In the case of each of these three variables the relationships are due to the responses from the county school systems and are not appreciably affected by the city group.

Model III shows a more marked hierarchy in the importance of the

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Model III about here

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independent variables. While the existence of social elites shows relatively a strong positive relationship (+.51), school superintendents are more likely to agree that students return because of poor quality education in the private schools if social elites are not present and if the private schools are representative of all grade levels. These relationships are stronger for the county school systems with (.59 vs .33) for the existence of social elites and (-.82 vs -.58) for school type.

Model IV contains four important independent variables. The number of private schools (+.56), the existence of social elites (-.64), private school affiliation (-.73) and private school type (-.37) are all at least moderately strong.

Model IV about here

Therefore if there is only one private school and social elites are not over-represented in the private school the public school officials are more likely to agree that students are returning due to the increasing cost of tuition. They are also likely to agree if the private schools are predominantly not religiously affiliated and if private schools offer all grade levels. The relationships involving the number of private schools and private school affiliation hold only for data from county school systems. Type of school tends to have the greatest impact among city school systems (-.54 vs -.28).

Model V is the first of four models dealing with the social impact of private schools. Two of the variables in Model V meet our importantance criteria in relationship to private schools handling student overloads.

Model V about here

School superintendents were inclined to agree where there was only 1 private school in the district (+.36). However, the incidence of social elites in the private school was the most important variable (-.52). If elites were present the public school official was more likely to agree. The impact of number of private schools was limited to city school systems. The existence of social elites was important in both city (-.38) and county (-.68) school systems, however, its greatest impact was in the county systems.

All the independent variables except the presence of social elites were important in Model VI. This model utilized private schools as an outlet for racial tension as the dependent variable.

Model VI about here

School officials agreed if there were more than one private school in the district (-.30), or if the private schools were predominantly not church related (-.73) and primarily elementary (+.32). However, school affiliation was certainly the most important variable in this model (-.73). Responses from city school systems weighed most heavily in these relationships.

Only one of our independent variables met the criteria of importance in Model VII. This model utilized making public school officials more aware as the dependent variable.

Model VII about here

The incidence of social elites (-.51) had an impact upon the dependent variable. Public school administrators from city systems where the social elite were over-represented tended to agree that private school development made public school officials more aware of the needs of the students.

Model VIII had only two important variables. Private schools tend to create social tensions in non-school areas was the dependent variable for this model. School officials where the social elite were over-represented tended to agree with the statement (-.49) as did those where private schools

Model VIII about here

were predominantly non-church related (-.66). In this instance private school affiliation was the most important variable. Breaking these relationships down by county-city system location marked the city systems as being primarily responsible for these relationships.

Conclusions

The first four models dealing with the decline of private schools had only one independent variable which met important criteria for each model. That was school type. It appears to indicate that public school officials are less aware or concerned with private school development when it is limited primarily to the elementary school level. Private school affiliation was important in three of the models. However, in Model II it maintained a positive relationship. The presence of social elites was also important in three of these models. It assumed a negative relationship in Model IV. The county-city breakdown resulted in county location having the most influence

in Models II and III. City school system location had the most impact on Models I and IV although its impact was not as pervasive as that of the county systems in Models II and III.

The last four models concerned with the social impact of private schools had only one variable important in three of the models. That was the incidence of social elites. No variables were important in all four models. Private school affiliation and number of private schools were important in two models each. County-City location appeared to have no patterned impact on the last four models. However, it seems relevant to not again that in reference to Model VI, city school system data was predominantly responsible for the relationships. Also in a general sense, relationships accounted for by county school system data tended to be shewed in more socially conservative directions. The presence of the social elites appears to be the most important variable in reference to all eight models. Herein we might argue that perhaps power politics plays in education as well as in many other sectors a major role. It tends to shape what we say as well as how we perceive certain situations and conditions. In reference to future research we suggest that perhaps the socio-economic conditions within particular school districts may also have some impact upon perhaps not the attitudes of public school officials but rather who those public school officials are. In future research we hope to compare the attitudes of public school officials in districts where private schools have developed with those where they have not.

MODELS I THROUGH IV

Model I: Increased faith in public schools	Combined	County	City
Number of schools	-.23	-.11	(-.50)
Elite in schools	.00	(-.38)	(.71)
Affiliation	(-.61)	(-.47)	(-.80)
Type school	(-.53)	(-.51)	(-.58)
Model II: Poor private school facilities			
Number of schools	.29	(.31)	.29
Elite in schools	(.54)	(.38)	***
Affiliation	(.38)	(.56)	.00
Type school	(-.56)	(.74)	.09
Model III: Poor quality education in private schools			
Number of schools	-.08	-.06	(-.43)
Elite in schools	(.51)	(.59)	(.33)
Affiliation	.09	(.33)	(-.33)
Type school	(-.70)	(-.82)	(-.58)
Model IV: Increasing tuition costs			
Number of schools	(.56)	(.83)	-.23
Elite in schools	(-.64)	***	(.43)
Affiliation	(-.73)	(-.43)	***
Type school	(-.37)	(-.28)	(-.54)

*** - 0 cells in analysis

MODELS V THROUGH VIII

Model V: Private schools took overload

Number of schools	(.36)	.29	(.36)
Elite in schools	(-.52)	(-.68)	(-.38)
Affiliation	***	***	***
Type school	.28	(-.47)	-.09

Model VI: Private schools provided an outlet for racial tension

Number of schools	(-.30)	.10	(-.71)
Elite in schools	***	***	***
Affiliation	(-.73)	(-.64)	(-.80)
Type school	(.32)	.14	(.50)

Model VII: Private schools made school officials more aware of needs

Number of schools	-.07	.09	(-.33)
Elite in schools	(-.51)	(-.32)	(-.80)
Affiliation	**	**	**
Type school	.24	(.43)	-.09

Model VIII: Private schools created community-based tensions

Number of schools	.08	.28	-.25
Elite in schools	(-.49)	-.24	**
Affiliation	(-.66)	(-.53)	(-.80)
Type school	-.20	(-.45)	.00

*** - o cells in analysis

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